

**Africanising/Decolonising Ourselves:  
The Implications for Advancing Critical University Studies –  
Africa (ACUSAfrica)**

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Webinar

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## **Bio**

André Keet currently holds the Research Chair for Critical Studies in Higher Education Transformation and is the Deputy Vice-Chancellor for Engagement and Transformation at Nelson Mandela University. He served as Director and Deputy Chief Executive Officer of the South African Human Rights Commission (SAHRC) and on the Commission for Gender Equality, before joining the university sector. Since entering the higher education field, André has held professorial positions at the universities of Pretoria, Fort Hare and Free State. He has been serving as transformation advisor and practitioner in various capacities in the sector. André's research and post-graduate supervision focus on radical approaches to the study of higher education, such as critical and abolitionist university studies.

## **Abstract**

This presentation envisions a conversation between the notions of Africanising and decolonising the university; and how this may look like in the South African and African context. It further locates these discussions within an African interpretation of Critical University Studies, understood as the study of universities through analyses of power, privilege and authority. Reflecting on different programmes and their associated practices that orbit the notions of Africanisation and decolonisation within universities, the talk also attempts at linking these praxes with the general decentring programme.

1. Dear friends and friends.
2. Thank you so much, Peggy, Maurice and Frans, for approaching me to present my thoughts on *Africanising/Decolonising Ourselves: The Implications for Advancing Critical University Studies – Africa (ACUSAfrica)*.
3. I am grateful for this opportunity... please read my intervention as an invitation for a discussion, an engagement... as we all try to make sense of the challenges facing the higher education sector in our different spaces.
4. I am presenting my talk in four integrated movements:
  - a. First... on refusal, reflection and the academy;
  - b. Second... on criticism and critique;
  - c. Third... on decolonising/ Africanising ourselves;
  - d. Fourth... I connect the first three movements to our work on Critical University Studies.
5. References to practical examples are dispersed throughout this talk.
6. For those of you who may not have heard, my good friend, collaborator, and founding member of the Critical University Studies-Africa network and the CUS-South Africa chapter, Michael Cross, passed away on Sunday morning...
7. I would like to deliver this talk in his honour... and acknowledge all those of you who may have lost loved ones and colleagues during this time.
8. So, let me begin in the shadows of my thoughts – my thoughts in the shadows.
9. They are always there, lurking – the dissonances and dissensions within myself generated by an awareness of my complicity in the transgressions of a system that is ‘producing’ me.
10. I have no place to put them.

11. They have been tracking me for a while now as I try to find my way within the academy. Are they meant to be dealt with, to be overcome? Or are they part of how I am fated to understand myself?
12. Functioning as persistent psychic disruptions, they are troubling my self-perception as a moral agent and a subject of moral worth – even as these are inscribed in my understanding of personhood linked to responsibility towards the moral good. Historically, my grasp of this moral good came to revolve around human rights, transformation, and social justice work within higher education and beyond.
13. These categories that have been defining my work, however, are slowly losing all authentic meaning. Mostly used brashly and unthinkingly, these notions are more and more deployed as brands and self-aggrandising trademarks and less as reference points that should steer action. Add to this the over-proximity and emptying of the concepts of decolonisation and social activism through bandwagonism, the linguistic universe – by which I have to make sense of the work that I do – is thinning out.
14. I am experiencing a weakening of the interpretive schemes within which to locate the confrontation with myself because what we are lacking within the academy is a critical ontology of *ourselves*. This explains in part our uncritical penchant for intellectual fads and fashions. They function as innocence-making manoeuvres, as moderators of our self-image.
15. Yet, I have to try... deploying the agency of guilt and shame with other agencies.
16. Reclaiming the emancipatory intent of concepts and ideas and creating new ones have been a part of my work in human rights, and now they are a part of my work in the academy.
17. Landing up in the academy was a random development, a coincidence, a chance. Contrary to my preconceived notions, its general averageness gave me the space to better appreciate work and life outside of the university: the public and private sector, civil society activism, state organs and institutions, community-based organisations, and so on.

18. Yet, I could not resist the character of the academy, nor its sense of self-importance coupled with the pursuit of various forms of power peculiar to the academic field.
19. It is a game I came to play ‘sufficiently well’, enabling me to partake in the spoils of the academic battle.
20. The exceptional everyday life of the ordinary came into much sharper focus the more time I spent within higher education, and the ordinary’s sheer will for meaningful existence – unbound by the academy – emerged more intelligible.
21. The bouts of personal guilt for not seeing it clearly, for being incapable of connecting with it, became louder... more persistent.
22. A few weeks ago, I attended a webinar on the Township Studies Network, convened by Ntabiseng Motsemme from the National Institute for the Humanities and Social Sciences.
23. It was a feast... rigorous scholarship, real life, real communities.
24. It made me wonder why the strategies of life that so many of our communities are engaged in within their everyday struggles are seldom looked upon through the principles of knowledge democracy or epistemic freedom.
25. I am haunted by this ... and have tried to engage with it biographically... as interrogative self-reflexivity. But as we all so well know, reflexivity is very limited ... especially in the context of retreating, undoing or refusing oneself. That is, to surgically slash and burn the self in studies on reflection does not readily feature as possible outcomes of the work on oneself.
26. Instead, we tend to reflect ourselves into innocence, even as we are profoundly implicated in the social and economic ills of our immediate spaces, the world and our institutions.
27. Some form of deep refusal is thus required.

28. My friend Michalinos Zembylas has recently published a paper titled “Refusal as affective and pedagogical practice in higher education decolonization: a modest proposal”.<sup>2</sup>
29. He argues that the theme recently emerged in contemporary literature on decolonisation in higher education is refusing the (colonial) university.<sup>3</sup> Referring to Grande, he further urges that the university historically ‘functioned as the institutional nexus for the capitalist and religious missions of the settler state, mirroring its histories of dispossession, enslavement, exclusion, forced assimilation and integration’.<sup>4</sup> Hence, refusing the university means taking a political stance and action ‘within, against, and beyond the university-as-such’<sup>5</sup>
30. This requires personal disinvestment from those social practices in higher education that advance the colonial logic ... disinvestment from so many of the practices within which we are implicated – materially, intellectually, and otherwise.
31. The surgery on oneself is not an easy undertaking, and I have been hesitant to engage the biographical tone that it, of necessity, must take ... and the re-centring of the self that, more-often-than-not, accompanies these undertakings.
32. In a piece that I wrote under the guidance of Monisha Bajaj for the *International Journal of Human Rights Education*, I reflected on the time I entered the human rights field in the mid-1990s when South Africa’s fledgeling democracy was the poster child of international human rights.<sup>6</sup>
33. Like any good human rights education zealot, I modelled almost all my praxes within the parameters established by the United Nations World Programme for Human Rights Education, and the work of international and national non-governmental organizations and civil society organisations in the field.

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<sup>2</sup> M Zembylas “Refusal as affective and pedagogical practice in higher education decolonization: a modest proposal, *Teaching in Higher Education*” 2021.

<sup>3</sup> S Grande “Refusing the University” 2018; A S Metcalfe “Thinking in Place: Picturing the Knowledge University as a Politics of Refusal” 2019; E Tuck & K W Yang “Unbecoming Claims: Pedagogies of Refusal in Qualitative Research” 2014. E Tuck & K W Yang “R-Words: Refusing Research” 2014; E Tuck & K W Yang “Introduction: Born Under the Rising Sign of Social Justice” 2018

<sup>4</sup> S Grande “Refusing the University” 2018: 47–48.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid: 51.

<sup>6</sup> A Keet “Does Human Rights Education Exist?” 2017.

34. Through my work, I later came to see how key human rights are within the colonial matrix: they facilitate the expansion and legitimisation of neoliberal logics, contribute to the reproduction of inequalities and unequal geopolitical arrangements, and advance the exercise of bio-power and social control.<sup>7</sup>
35. My key interest in the 2000s then shifted more sharply to human rights critiques... trying to disclose to myself and others the hidden injuries of the rights discourse as the dominant moral language of our time whilst also trying to stay loyal to it.
36. These include decolonial critiques of human rights.
37. This work has been done with key collaborators such as Felisa Tibbitts and Michalinos Zembylas.
38. *Critique*, as in Marxism and social theory generally, has been an organising intellectual principle for my work. Not only in the human rights field but also in higher education studies after I entered the academy in 2009.
39. When I reflected on epistemic othering and the decolonisation of knowledge in a 2014 paper<sup>8</sup> which was part of a series of engagements on knowledge and the disciplines, I relied on Fricker's notion of *hermeneutical injustice*, which she defines as the '*injustice of having some significant area of one's social experience obscured from collective understanding owing to a structural identity prejudice in the collective hermeneutical resource*' (original italics).<sup>9</sup> Given the Eurocentric nature and practices of the disciplines in African higher education, it is plausible to argue, so I suggested at that time, that what is systematically obscured by the 'structural prejudice in the collective interpretive resource' is that-which-is-designated 'African'.

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<sup>7</sup> A Keet "It is Time: Critical Human Rights Education in an Age of Counter-Hegemonic Distrust" 2015

<sup>8</sup> A Keet "Epistemic 'Othering' and the Decolonisation of Knowledge" 2014.

<sup>9</sup> M Fricker *Epistemic Injustice Power & the Ethics of Knowing*" 2007

40. The designation here is not that which *is* African or Africa. Rather, following Mbembe,<sup>10</sup> I refer to that-which-is-designated ‘African’ in relation to a discourse that presents ‘African’ as that which is ‘incomplete, mutilated, and unfinished’.
41. As I tried to make sense of the ‘decolonial’ turn at that time, and given South Africa’s history of Apartheid dogma, I was (and have been since) wary of paradigms and programmes that are not accompanied by an energetic, rigorous self-critique.
42. Marx’s original injunction of a ‘ruthless criticism of everything existing’ – a criticism that ‘must not be afraid of its own conclusion, or of conflict with the powers that be’ – has been key in my thinking.<sup>11</sup>
43. This well-known reference to Marx is seldom cited together with Marx’s refusal to set up ‘any dogmatic flag’<sup>12</sup> that appears in the same letter he wrote to Ruge in 1843. Criticism, says Marx, is an opening up – to clarify in any critical programme the ‘meaning of its own struggle and its own desires’.
44. Michael Cross shared this principle of self-critique with me.
45. So, when the two of us started collaborating on two book series on higher education transformation and higher education in Africa, we argued that the series built on intellectual contributions through the lens of *critique* aimed at seeking emancipatory alternatives and facilitating productive *critical* praxes.<sup>13</sup>
46. Mobilising Hoy, we argue that the *critical* in these series must also challenge the ‘self-certainty of the critical attitude that confidently assumes that it is really in the know’.<sup>14</sup> The *critical* is called upon to confront its own codes, dogmas and doctrines. Therefore, the praxes and transformative actions that emerge from the *critical* must discard their self-

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<sup>10</sup> A Mbembe *On the Postcolony* 2001

<sup>11</sup> M Karl "For a Ruthless Criticism of Everything Existing" 1798

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> A Keet "Crisis and Critique: Critical Theories and the Renewal of Citizenship, Democracy, and Human Rights Education" 2020. A Keet & M Zembylas "Conceptual Considerations" 2018

<sup>14</sup> D C Hoy *Critical Resistance: From Poststructuralism to Post-critique* 2004: 237

certainty to be self-critical, ‘reflect on [their] own contingent circumstances and contextual limitations’, and thus, remain open to moderation and other possibilities’.<sup>15</sup>

47. *Critique* has the renewal of our cultural traditions, institutions, knowledges and practices in a world in which structural arrangements only further serve to systemically and systematically moor inequalities and exclusions. This posture requires demanding and courageous reflective processes of self-clarification within the academy to engage with our forms of life, cultural traditions, academic dispositions and social practices.<sup>16</sup>
48. Forgive me; I am making these detours to provide a backdrop for why I think the *decolonising/Africanising* project should generate its own rigorous self-critiques ... since I believe that all knowledge formations have the inherent capacity for epistemic violence.
49. So, in the 2014 paper, I propose shifting away from standard arguments that see knowledge disruptions mainly as content, organisation or packaging matters.<sup>17</sup> I also suggest avoiding simplified arguments on knowledge inclusivity and epistemological pluralism because they do not have an associated political ‘ethics’.
50. Further, like Teffo<sup>18</sup> (and here I am continuing to refer to the 2014 work), I do not invalidate Western epistemologies; they are housed in their own ethnosciences and are productive and dynamic in their own right. I am also sceptical about arguments that want to ‘insert’ an ‘African’ voice into an assimilative Western epistemological network. ‘African studies’, our best possible option, have shown how troublesome this strategy can be. In essence, I want to propose that the ‘decolonisation of knowledge’ is viewed as the collective process by which disciplinary practices successfully work against the inscribed epistemic injustices that may be resident in *all* knowledge formations.
51. I have yet to revisit this work ... and perhaps it is time to do so.

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> See N Kompridis *Critique and Disclosure: Critical Theory between Past and Future* 2006: 8

<sup>17</sup> A Keet "Spectacle and Spectators: Higher Education and the 'Disappearance' of Democracy" 2014

<sup>18</sup> L Teffo "Epistemic Pluralism for Knowledge Transformation" 2011

52. My point here is that innocent knowledges are scarce ... in the same way, Mbembe<sup>19</sup> is worried about the lack of critique of indigenous knowledges in the theories of the decolonial; and Falola's<sup>20</sup> injunction to be critical of our African knowledges.
53. Undoubtedly, Mbembe is one of the most innovative, contemporary African thinkers on decolonisation; and his latest book, *Out of the Dark Night ...* is a festival of difficult, powerful ideas.<sup>21</sup>
54. Yet, he is not sufficiently critical of postcolonial interpretive frameworks. Despite the productive intellectual inroads made by postcolonial studies in the direction of epistemic justice, I am slightly more careful, and you have heard me say this before, because of postcolonialism's tendency for moving-away-but-moving-towards centres of Western power; and its tendency to forget that its' referent in the real world is a form of political, economic, and discursive oppression whose name, first and last, is *colonialism* (original italics)<sup>22</sup> ... and here I am quoting Slemon.
55. There is no space here to formulate this point with any sophistication. I can simply alert myself to what undergirds Acheraiou's<sup>23</sup> call for the "decolonisation of postcolonial discourses".
56. Further, on the back of arguments made by Madlingozi,<sup>24</sup> Zeleza,<sup>25</sup> Msindo,<sup>26</sup> Falola and Jennings,<sup>27</sup> the calls to Africanise African Studies and decolonise decolonial studies suggest that racism, as ideology, has been a central interest in the reform of ordinary knowledge into scientific knowledge.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> A Mbembe "Decolonising the University: New Directions" 2016

<sup>20</sup> T Falola & C Jennings *Africanizing Knowledge African Studies Across the Disciplines* 2002

<sup>21</sup> A Mbembe *Out of the Dark Night: Essays on Decolonization* 2021

<sup>22</sup> See S Slemon "The Scramble for Post-colonialism" 1990

<sup>23</sup> A Acheraiou *Questioning Hybridity, Postcolonialism and Globalization* 2011

<sup>24</sup> T Madlingozi "Decolonising 'decolonisation' with Es'kia Mphahlele" 2020

<sup>25</sup> P Zeleza *The Transformation of Global Higher Education, 1945-2015* 2016

<sup>26</sup> E Msindo *African Studies and its Configurations: Histories, Challenges and Opportunities* 2020

<sup>27</sup> T Falola & C Jennings *Africanizing Knowledge African Studies Across the Disciplines* 2002

<sup>28</sup> G Bachelard *The Formation of the Scientific Mind* 2002

57. Over the past four years, I have shared my work on racism's knowledge ... and presented some of my thoughts last week at the conference of the Canadian Sociological Association on a panel organised by Shirley Anne Tate and Alex De Costa.
58. *Knowledge belongs to racism*, so I argue ... and the disciplinary hold of racism over knowledge, discharges itself into the realm of policy and programme implementation in universities systems, nationally and globally – even if such policies and programmes may, in theory, have progressive intent.
59. This work, again, has been shaped by projects with friends and colleagues such as Shirley Anne Tate and Encarna Gutierrez-Rodriguez.
60. It is now finding practical expression in our Critical University Studies – Africa, the Africa and Knowledge seminar series, and attempts to grow a local, regional and international network.
61. More importantly, we have examples of deep knowledge work excavating African intellectual traditions within our university and elsewhere.
62. However, we have to be wide awake to assimilatory processes that turn one's work against the broader social justice project and against oneself.
63. This is the worry and critique that I (with others) presented to the South African education research community in 2017 in an editorial titled *An Awkward, Uneasy Decoloniality ...* a phrase I borrowed from Mignolo.<sup>29</sup>
64. Given these trends, *critique* as praxes and *the critical* as a programme within the parameters of my own work, requires a critique of itself ... in a continuous process of shifts and revitalisations.

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<sup>29</sup> A Keet, S D Sattarzadeh & A Munene "An Awkward, Uneasy (De)Coloniality Higher Education and Knowledge Otherwise" 2017

65. What are my desires? How and why does something appear as researchable and writeable to me?
66. With a keen eye on these questions, the permanent incompleteness of my own thoughts and practices should always hover around me.
67. In a recently published piece, Michalinos and I<sup>30</sup> set out, for ourselves, ways of classifying ‘critical theories’ broadly speaking, so as to locate a decolonised Africana Critical Theory as formulated by Massey<sup>31</sup> and Rabaka<sup>32</sup> ... and maybe, a Black Critical and Cultural Theory as proposed by De Cristo.<sup>33</sup>
68. We suggest that *the critical* is that place from which we can cut through surface appearances, disrupt our receivable categories and interpretive schemes, and go behind that which we produce as truth. Simply put, *the critical* is the source of our disrupted selves.
69. Paola Rebughini,<sup>34</sup> in a 2018 article critical of Marxist conceptions of critique, suggests the possibility to develop the capacity ‘to produce critique by imagining the ‘new’, denying the ‘given’ and coping with the constraints ... from everyday life experiences’. [It] ‘is the work of love, justice, imagination and actualization; [...] [where] ‘critique can arise from the creation of alternatives generated by internal and unpredictable transformations’.
70. She further argues that critical agencies have an unstable openness and incompleteness that, despite its fragility, tries to catch up ‘with the right moment, where resistance and creativity, unveiling and redemption, can meet’.
71. Is the decolonial turn perhaps one of *the right* moments for us – one of our redemptive sites?

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<sup>30</sup> A Keet & M Zembylas “Conceptual Considerations” 2018

<sup>31</sup> M Basse “What is Africana Critical Theory or Black Existential Philosophy?” 2007

<sup>32</sup> R Rabaka *Africana Critical Theory Reconstructing The Black Radical Tradition, From W. E. B. Du Bois and C. L. R. James to Frantz Fanon and Amilcar Cabral* 2009

<sup>33</sup> J Decristo “Black Critical and Cultural Theory” 2018: 3

<sup>34</sup> P Rebughini “Critical Agency and the Future of Critique” 2018

72. Decolonisation names *the critical* emerging in the colonies and ex-colonies and for this reason decolonial thinkers such as Grosfoguel<sup>35</sup> has been developing the idea of a Critical Decolonial Theory, in conversation with and *against* the critical theories as espoused in Western social theory more generally.
73. But, as you can gather ... for me, the decolonial turn should first and foremost have a critical, open attitude towards itself.
74. For example: Mbembe<sup>36</sup> suggests that ‘there is hardly any critique of so-called ‘indigenous epistemologies,’ and in more than one instance, the latter are simply conflated with traditional cosmogonies or vernacular arts de faire, including crafts, narratives, and proverbs’. He argues that ‘[i]n some instances, decolonization is easily reduced to a matter of origins and identity, race and location.’
75. ‘What confers authority,’ [he continues], ‘is where one comes from, the putative community one belongs to, not the truth validity of the claims being made’.
76. Given these directions, *self-critique* should be constitutive of the decolonial ... its praxes, in the same way, that it should be part of *the decentring movement*; or the Southern attitude of which Claudio Pinheiro spoke so well last Friday.
77. In responding to the question of *Africanising*, we are collaborating as a team made up of scholar-friends, Uchenna Okeja, Mutinda Nzioko, Nomalanga Mkhize and others in the research chair – connecting our work with the Faculty of Humanities, and the broader university.
78. In putting the *Africa and Knowledge* seminar series together, Uchenna suggested that we engage and critique the epistemic resources through which Africans have made sense of themselves and the world, and to use these resources to create new forms of knowledge that are capable of guiding action on our continent today.

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<sup>35</sup> R Grosfoguel ‘Decolonizing post-colonial studies and paradigms of political economy: Transmodernity, decolonial thinking, and global coloniality’ 2011.

<sup>36</sup> A Mbembe *Out of the Dark Night: Essays on Decolonization* 2021

79. This provided useful directions for what Africanisation within higher education may mean, together with the seminal work of Falola, Ramose and others.
80. As Falola and Jennings suggest, this does not mean an ‘uncritical acceptance of all things African in our work’.<sup>37</sup>
81. Being both profoundly ‘Southern’, the initial weak conversation between Africanisation and decolonisation did strike me as odd; it is sometimes used interchangeably without any conceptual clarity.
82. This is changing ... and the conversation has started taking a firmer shape.
83. Here again Mbembe provides guidance, albeit around the notion of Afropolitanism – and reminds us of how Ngugi, two decades after Fanon, connected Africanisation and decolonisation.<sup>38</sup>
84. He notes that in Ngugi’s terms, decolonization’s main aim was “to see ourselves clearly in relationship to ourselves and to other selves in the universe”.<sup>39</sup> “Education,” writes Ngugi, “is a means of knowledge about ourselves [...] After we have examined ourselves, we radiate outwards and discover peoples and worlds around us. With Africa at the centre of things, not existing as an appendix or a satellite of other countries”.<sup>40</sup>
85. Or, in Zeleza’s terms ... Africa should not be written by analogy any longer.<sup>41</sup>
86. Another colleague and friend, Kopano Ratele has also been immensely helpful in his book *The World Looks Like This from Here ... Thoughts on African Psychology*.<sup>42</sup>
87. Africanisation, or African-centredness, Kopano argues, suggests the quest to “better locate Africa and Africans in knowledge;” and to “produce ideas that are disalienating for a

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<sup>37</sup> T Falola & C Jennings *Africanizing Knowledge African Studies Across the Disciplines* 2002

<sup>38</sup> A Mbembe *Out of the Dark Night: Essays on Decolonization* 2021

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*: 57

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> P T Zeleza *African Studies and Universities since Independence* 2009: 110–135

<sup>42</sup> K Ratele *The World Looks Like This From Here: Thoughts on African Psychology* 2019

meaningful life in Africa”... he refers to decolonised African-centred psychological knowledge ... and does use the notions in tandem.<sup>43</sup>

88. Others, like Le Grange, mobilise Kwezi Prah’s distinction between Africanisation and Africanism. For Prah,<sup>44</sup> according to Le Grange, “Africanisation involves the systematic and deliberate deployment of Africans in positions that enable them to gain control of society. [...] Although Africanisation may serve as the basis for Africanism, the latter concerns more than just demographic representation and, in addition, is concerned with making African culture the centre of Africa’s development.”
89. Bringing these two notions together, ‘Le Grange argues that the project of Africanising is, therefore, a decolonising/decolonial one because it involves the undoing of colonialism (in all its forms) in Africa.<sup>45</sup>
90. Then we also have Dani Nabudere’s conception of Afrikology, an African-centred epistemology which Baba Buntu,<sup>46</sup> like Le Grange, sees as a decolonial strategy.
91. Minga argues that Asante’s *Afrocentricity* embraces Africanism, or perhaps blackness ... and he prefers to look at the notions of *Africanising and Decolonising* from different conceptual angles.<sup>47</sup>
92. Thus, there is certainly an uptake in the literature on the conversation between Africanisation and Decolonisation; and the idea that they represent twin strategies seems to be taking root ... as Chinakonam argues.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> K Prah “Africanism and Africanisation: Do they mean the same thing?” 2004

<sup>45</sup> L L le Grange “Decolonising, Africanising, Indigenising, and Internationalising Curriculum Studies: Opportunities to (re)imagine the Field” 2018

<sup>46</sup> B Bantu “Claiming Self; The Role of Afrikology In Social Transformation” 2013

<sup>47</sup> K J Minga “African Discourses on the Africanization and Decolonization of Social and Human Sciences” 2021

<sup>48</sup> J O Chimakonam “Decolonisation, Africanisation and Transformation: Why We Need ‘That’ African Contribution to World History and Civilisation” 2019

93. Yet, others, like Rozena Maart, argue that the dominant discourse on decolonisation has given scant consideration to Black Studies – and African scholars – in a recent compilation on ‘*Decoloniality and Decolonial Education: South Africa and the World*’.<sup>49</sup>
94. These encounters and contestations between *Africanising and Decolonising* are productive and provide for multiple ways forward within the context of the broader decentring project.
95. Yet, such undertaking, for our collective and us located within our institutions, would have to include the affective dimensions of the self and its investments into the colonial privileges that Sharon Stein<sup>50</sup> refers to; for us to generate the ‘space’, in all its facets, for the Southern and Indigenous epistemologies which are central to Raewyn Connell’s<sup>51</sup> work, to be rightfully located on a landscape of epistemic freedoms.
96. Here, a self-critique of a special type is required.
97. And such critique does not have a set path as Rebughini is arguing...
98. Thus, critical reflexivity does not have a formula either ... in our line of work; reflexivity may mean the out of control spiralling of subject reformations, deep dislocations of the self.
99. In a recent chapter, Muthwa<sup>52</sup> and I mobilise Pola Maneli’s work<sup>53</sup> when he speaks about ‘interrogative self-reflexivity’<sup>54</sup> in his arguments on the transgressive performativity of Blackness. For Stein,<sup>55</sup> and here I am continuing to refer to the Keet/Muthwa chapter, such

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<sup>49</sup> R Maart, S Dey, P Segalo, J Solis, S Broeck & C P Torquato “Decoloniality and Decolonial Education: South Africa and the World” 2021

<sup>50</sup> S Stein “Beyond Higher Education as We Know it: Gesturing Towards Decolonial Horizons of Possibility” 2019

<sup>51</sup> For example, see R Connell “Using Southern Theory: Decolonizing Social thought in Theory, Research and Application: 2014 in *Planning Theory* 13(2): 210–223.

<sup>52</sup> A Keet & S Muthwa “The Transformative, Responsive University in South Africa” 2021

<sup>53</sup> P Maneli *The Indigenous I/Eye: Transgressive Performativities of Blackness within the South African Visual Arts* Pola 2020

<sup>54</sup> See also C Eppert “Relearning Questions: Responding to the Ethical Address of the Past and Present in Others” in R I Simon, S Rosenberg & C Eppert (eds.) *Between Hope and Despair: Pedagogy and the Representation of Historical Trauma*: 213–230.

<sup>55</sup> A Keet & S Muthwa “The Transformative, Responsive University in South Africa” 2021

reflexivity should work against our denialism and our investments in the system.<sup>56</sup> In a sense, these authors are suggesting ‘transgressing the self’,<sup>57</sup> ‘losing the self’<sup>58</sup> and ‘undoing the self’,<sup>59</sup> so that we develop an orientation to authentically ‘engage with and revere the insights, practices, and imaginings that are rooted within historically marginalized ways of knowing and being, without [...] instrumentalizing them’ as Stein, is arguing.<sup>60</sup>

100. This is what Muthwa has in mind around the notion of hubs of convergence;<sup>61</sup> the co-creation of spaces, physical and otherwise, where we can transgress the conventional character of the university and its academy. To find this place, metaphorically speaking, one first must lose the self; ‘undo oneself’ to be receptive and open to the knowledge of our communities and the education they offer.
101. Hubs of Convergence is now a signature project in our university driven by Bruce Damons and his team.
102. In a sense, decolonising ourselves presupposes a type of reflexivity rooted in continuous self-refusal ... this refusal should not be confused with soft biographical and non-biographical self-reflections.
103. Such refusal is partly what I have in mind with the notion of *decolonising ourselves* ... and for us, on the Continent and in the diaspora, *Africanising ourselves* ... inclusive of Afropolitan conceptions.
104. Both these are movements of *decentring*: dependent on affective, intellectual, material, and other forms of disinvestment from the colonial privileges that constitute us and the ‘university-as-such’<sup>62</sup>.

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<sup>56</sup> S Stein “Beyond Higher Education as We Know it: Gesturing Towards Decolonial Horizons of Possibility” 2019

<sup>57</sup> S Coleman “Transgressing the Self: Making Charismatic Saints. *Critical Inquiry*” 2009

<sup>58</sup> A Bown “Losing the Self: Transgression in Lawrence and Bataille” 2012

<sup>59</sup> S Stein “Beyond Higher Education as We Know it: Gesturing Towards Decolonial Horizons of Possibility” 2019

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>61</sup> S Muthwa “Inaugural speech of Vice-Chancellor Professor Sibongile Muthwa 17 April 2018” 2018

<sup>62</sup> Concept borrowed from the Undercommoning Project. <http://undercommoning.org/>

105. The historical twinning of decolonisation and Africanisation on our Continent suggests that we have productive resources available for the decentring project ... and this is most definitely observable in comparison to other university systems.
106. But the university systems on our Continent and in South Africa lag behind other systems in other significant ways ... as Paul Zeleza so ably demonstrates.<sup>63</sup>
107. This is not a topic I am exploring in this talk ... though it does impact our decolonisation project.
108. Having provided the outlines of a conversation between decolonisation and Africanisation and related it to the work on the self and within our institutions, let me briefly locate these arguments within the context of Critical University Studies (CUS).
109. I would like to acknowledge the work of the research assistants, Luan Staphorst, Hashali Hamukuaya, and Azra Rajah, on the CUS project, and the following discussion is mostly based on the research report written by this team.
110. Jeffrey Williams coined “Critical University Studies” in a 2013 article published in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*.<sup>64</sup> Published as a ‘review’, the piece provides a snapshot of a type of research that Williams identifies as having emerged in the 1990s. This research is critical in nature, with much of it ‘condemn[ing] the rise of “academic capitalism” and the corporatization of the university’, whilst another ‘substantial wing has focused on the deteriorating conditions of academic labor’, and, finally as an afterthought, ‘some of it has pointed out the problems of students and their escalating debt.’
111. Following Williams’ article, an ‘institutionalized’ discourse on CUS started taking shape ... through various book series at established mainstream academic presses and the emergence of various research networks, working groups, and academic programmes, which have been described as CUS.

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<sup>63</sup> P Zeleza “The Giant Challenge of Higher Education in Africa” 2018

<sup>64</sup> J Williams " Deconstructs Academe The Birth of Critical Univeristy Studies" 2012

112. The main weakness of CUS, as formulated and advanced through this first wave, is that its organising conceptual departure point is the ‘ideal university’ that once existed in the past – within a modern/colonial imaginary.
113. This criticism comes primarily from the *Abolitionist University* collective. The Abolitionist University (AB) collective argues that CUS is fatally flawed unless it adopts an abolitionist stance.<sup>65</sup>
114. Amongst the small number of 6 networks and programmes across the globe, CUS-Africa is the first CoP based in and focussed on the Global South, specifically the African continent. The network does not provide a definition of CUS but rather describes its work in relation to an emancipatory project through which higher education institutions and their futures could be imagined differently.
115. The focus on knowledge from the Global South is of further importance, as this presents a criticism of CUS, which is almost wholly grounded in theories and paradigms of the North.
116. CUS-Africa shares the criticism levelled against CUS by the Abolitionist University collective and the Undercommoning Network; more importantly, racism, sexism, discrimination, decolonising, and *Africanising* the university are key themes for CUS-Africa.
117. For CUS-Africa, as for the AB collective, the university-as-a-public-good – as a historical phenomenon – never existed.
118. On Saturday, I attended the launch of the research chair on African Feminist Imagination which is held by Pumla Gqola at our university within the Centre for Gender and Women Studies ... the work already done and the future research programme of the Chair is a great affirmation of what is possible around decolonising and Africanising the university, even as the tasks ahead of us remain massive.

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<sup>65</sup> A Boggs, E Meyerhoff, N Mitchell & Z Schwartz-Weinstein “Abolitionist University Studies: An Invitation” 2019

119. Yet, being aware of our colonial complicities and our historical production within the modern colonial matrix of South Africa and our Continent, generally speaking, we should remain committed to the work on the self. That is, these interventions are as important for us as they are for people somewhere else.
120. The solidarities that are possible within the decentring programme are infinite, especially if we read the decentring of Europe that Derrida speaks of in *The Other Heading* as a Europe-to-come as a global intellectual and programmatic project ... for which we all have a collective responsibility. This applies to the Global North in general.
121. Mbembe would say that such a responsibility is already carried by postcolonial theory ... rewriting the biography of Europe ... and writing the biography of the colonies and the ex-colonies.<sup>66</sup>
122. *Decolonising/ Africanising ourselves* are prerequisites in these writing and re/writing processes.
123. Thus, the programme of CUS-Africa is deeply invested in this twin strategy.
124. It also reaches out across various boundaries and vernaculars because it knows that the decentring imperative is dependent on ‘the awareness of the imbrication of here and elsewhere, the presence of elsewhere here and vice versa [...] to valorize the traces of the far-off in the nearby, to domesticate the unfamiliar’ as Mbembe argues on Afropolitanism.<sup>67</sup>
125. Here again, such awareness as crucial to the decentring project, may well be a function of *decolonising/ Africanising ourselves*.

Thank you

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<sup>66</sup> A Mbembe *Out of the Dark Night: Essays on Decolonization* 2021.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

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